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28 August 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Conversation with Secretary McNamara

1. Per the arrangement you had made, I went to Secretary McNamara's office at 1030 on Monday, 28 August. During a pleasant half-hour of informal, private conversation, he outlined his concern over his inability to get much depth or perspective on the Vietnam war out of the papers which flowed daily across his desk, and said he felt there was no person of office in the Pentagon who could provide him with the kind of thoughtful analysis he wanted and felt he urgently needed. He expressed a high regard for the Agency and said he felt that the kind of guidance and suggestions he wanted on trends in Vietnamese affairs or the meaning of current developments would have to come from CIA. He therefore requested that we set up an informal procedure whereby he, Mr. Nitze and I would get together at regular intervals to review the bidding on the Vietnam war and analyze trends and developments as they emerged. After some further discussion we decided to start by meeting at 1030 every Monday morning in Secretary McNamara's office, beginning next Monday, 4 September.*

2. Secretary McNamara said that he would not want current intelligence briefings, since he could absorb what he termed the "hot news" quite readily out of the papers that came across his desk, particularly the CIB, which he praised highly. What he did want was a discussion of trends and more fundamental topics. He outlined the following examples as illustrations of the sort of things he had in mind:

a. Forces in South Vietnam moving towards the idea of negotiated settlement.

b. Signs of a shift in the North Vietnamese position on the war or on negotiations.

*At the time we made this agreement neither of us noted that next Monday is Labor Day. I will check to find out what the Secretary's pleasure is on next Monday's meeting.

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c. The situation in the field in South Vietnam, particularly in the pacification area, along with an examination of how various means of reporting this situation in detail were working.

d. An independent appraisal of the military campaign in South Vietnam (was it at a stalemate? If not, why not?), together with an analysis of any trends developing in NVA/VC Main Force behavior.

e. What kind of reports were we getting from our penetration agents in the Viet Cong on the current state of Communist cadre morale or Communist plans?

f. The progress of our Political Action program directed at splitting up the Front.

3. In going over the above, Secretary McNamara outlined some of the propositions already being made to the North Vietnamese and advised me that through the Kissinger contact in Paris, the US Government had actually offered to halt the bombing in return for negotiations, without the pre-condition of reduced military activity on the part of the Vietnamese Communists. This is an ultra-sensitive matter which Mr. McNamara said I was at liberty to discuss with you, but he requested that it go no further than the two of us. He also asked that you not indicate awareness of this to any third party (e.g., Messrs. Rusk or Katzenbach) unless they themselves had already told you. I assured him on your behalf and mine that we would respect his confidence. He noted that if our weekly sessions were to be fruitful, he and Mr. Nitze would need to keep me (and, hence, you) apprised of current policy thinking and planning.

4. Mr. McNamara felt our weekly sessions would be most beneficial if they were kept small, informal, and relatively unstructured. He and Mr. Nitze may ask for papers as a result of topics brought up during our conversations but they will not expect any regular, routine input to these discussions.

5. During the course of the conversation, particularly as we were discussing the difficulty of getting an over-all picture of the total situation in Vietnam, I told Mr. McNamara about the Situation Room we were putting together and the close liaison we had developed with SACS and the Systems Analysis component of DOD in this venture. He was delighted to hear about

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this and expressed a strong desire to see our room once it is in operation. I suggested that we might occasionally hold our sessions over here where all the maps and graphics would be readily at hand, and Secretary McNamara was much taken with this idea.

6. I was impressed again not only with Mr. McNamara's intellectual abilities, but also with his sense of urgent groping to comprehend the Vietnam war and make meaning of it. Quite frankly, he was asking for help, which, using the full resources of this Agency, I will do my best to provide.

7. I will keep you fully informed on the substance of these weekly conversations, but will not tell anyone else in the Agency about them unless and until you give explicit instructions on this matter.

George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Orig - DCI
1 - McNamara Meetings file
1 - GAC Chrono ✓

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